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DEPARTMENT FOR NEA/ARP

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/05/2018

TAGS: PGOV PREL YM

SUBJECT: TWO SIDES AGREE TO REVIVE QATARI MEDIATION IN SAADA

REF: 07 SANA 2124

Classified By: Ambassador Stephen A. Seche for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

Summary

¶1. (C) A February 1 agreement to reinvigorate the stalled Qatari mediation efforts in Saada was followed by a brief continuation of the violence and then a reported cease fire. While any good news in this conflict is welcome, difficulties implementing earlier cease-fire agreements lead post to remain guarded in its optimism. End Summary

Agreement signed in Doha

¶2. (U) Opposition and independent media reported on February 1 that Presidential advisor AbdulKarim al-Eryani met in Doha with Saleh Habrah, a representative of Saada rebel leader Abdulmalik al-Houthi, and that the two agreed to revive the June 2007 Qatari-backed peace deal. The story was confirmed in the Qatari media, which noted that the meeting had been sponsored by Emir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani.

¶3. (C) Ali Babaka, a political analyst working at the Qatari embassy in Sana'a, told POL/ECON Chief on February 3 that his Ambassador was quite confident about the prospects for the cease fire. Babaka specifically noted that this was the most optimistic the Qatari Ambassador has been since efforts began to reinvigorate the moribund mediation in November (reftel). (Note: That reinvigoration effort, which was spearheaded by al-Eryani, was predicated on the direct involvement of Abdul Malik al-Houthi. It appears this condition has been dropped. End Note.) Babaka hastened to emphasize that the agreement reached in Doha was not a new peace agreement but merely an agreement to reinvigorate the stalled mediation effort.

¶4. (U) The agreement did not have an immediate positive impact on the ground. Fighting began to heat up in Saada almost as soon as the meeting was announced. Deutsche Presse-Agentur reported on February 3 that 14 people, including seven soldiers, had been killed and scores had been injured in the previous two days in renewed fighting in the region. On the same day a helicopter crashed in the Haiden area of Saada. Some independent media sources reported that the helicopter had been shot down by al-Houthi fighters. The MoD-funded 26sep.net denied the story, saying the aircraft had rolled after landing on rough terrain. On February 5, the website of the Yemeni Socialist party Aleshteraki.net reported that President Saleh had ordered government troops in Saada to cease fire on February 4 at 18:00 and that the area had been calm since that time. Doha-based Qatari Daily Alarab, however, reported on February 6 that Abdul Malik al-Houthi had accused Yemeni authorities of attacking al-Houthi elements after the agreement was signed.

COMMENT

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15. (C) While any progress on this issue is positive, violence in the area could flare up again at any time. Post is only guardedly optimistic about possible amelioration of the situation in this strife-torn province. End comment.

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